

DE News

****SPECIAL EDITION****

May 23, 2001 - Iowa Department of Education - Ted Stilwill, Director

From the Director's desk:

- ***Governor signs landmark teacher quality-student achievement legislation***

Today Governor Vilsack signed two important pieces of legislation Senate File 476, the “policy” bill for teacher compensation, and House File 413, the teacher compensation funding bill. This action begins reshaping how teachers are compensated and supported in Iowa. For many, this effort responds to our goal of improving student learning, as well as the critical issues of looming teacher shortages in rural and urban Iowa and a declining comparability of Iowa teachers’ salaries with those in other states.

Professional Development is a Number One Priority

These critical issues create a unique opportunity for Iowa to define teaching differently. Iowa can now become the state that provides the most effective professional support for beginning teachers and the strongest professional development and continued learning for experienced teachers. Iowa teachers today are among the very best in the country, but without stronger support in terms of both compensation and professional development, our educational system will not be able to meet the challenges that face us tomorrow. Those of us in education are learning what every successful sector of public or private enterprise already knows. The future success of our “enterprise” depends upon investing in the quality of our professional workforce, Iowa’s teachers. This legislation responds by investing \$1.5 million during this next school year to begin the shift toward researched based professional development for Iowa teachers.

Statewide Availability of Mentoring and Induction

This legislation also invests \$2.4 million next year and \$4.8 million in the following school year for statewide availability of a two-year mentoring program. Districts choosing to participate in the mentoring portion will adopt a formal mentoring program that meets quality standards. The state will pay districts \$1,300 per new teacher for each of the teacher’s first two years. Mentors would be paid a minimum of \$500 per semester and the district may use remaining dollars to offset other costs.

All Teacher Salaries Can Improve

Improving salaries was the straightforward goal for most education stakeholders involved in this process. Attracting and retaining quality teachers is clearly this state’s number one education priority. This legislation responds to that goal by appropriating \$31.2 million for the next school year that can improve salaries for ALL Iowa teachers. ALL Iowa teachers can benefit from

participating. The \$31.2 million is allocated to all school districts based upon a formula of 50% student enrollment and 50% number of teachers. Districts choosing to participate next school year will gain access to their district allocation. Some districts may access class size/early intervention dollars to supplement these priorities.

In priority order, the district must:

- First, raise beginning teacher salaries by \$1,500 per year until the district reaches a minimum salary of \$28,000. Second-year teacher salaries must increase as well. (Estimated first-year cost to raise first- and second-year teachers: \$3.9 million to 3,300 first- and second-year teachers.)
- Second, begin raising the salary of any other teacher in the district with two or more years of experience who currently earns less than \$30,000. Iowa school districts that pay 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th or even 7th year teachers under \$30,000 must begin bringing those teachers up to \$30,000. (This provides approximately 4,000 veteran Iowa teachers with a much needed raise at an estimated cost of \$9.3 million.)
- Third, distribute remaining funds to remaining veteran teachers. In all likelihood, districts will keep the same salary schedule for these veteran teachers until the final two career stages are finalized by the legislature and funds are appropriated. (\$18 million is available for salary increases to these veteran Iowa teachers.)
- In any case, a teacher may not receive less than they did during this current school year.
- These funds are **in addition** to raises already negotiated for next school year.

This legislation proposes that salaries for **all** Iowa teachers can improve next school year. All districts are eligible for their allocation. Funds for districts choosing not to participate next year will be held in reserve for FY03. According to the legislation, districts must participate by July 1, 2003.

Defining Good Teaching, Setting Aspirations

This legislation for the first time in Iowa history begins to define what educators proudly do every day in the classroom. The Iowa Teaching Standards create a framework for local districts and educators to define high quality teaching. Professional development opportunities will need to foster the skills reinforcing these standards as well respond to the student achievement goals of the local school improvement plan. Beginning teacher mentoring and induction programs will key in on these standards. The five-year comprehensive evaluation will also rely on this framework as a starting point for personalization at the local level.

Today, Iowa teachers educate our children using these teaching practices. Check this list. You will be hard-pressed to find an educator in Iowa who doesn't believe in these standards.

Iowa Teaching Standards

- Demonstrates the ability to enhance academic performance and support for and implementation of the school district's student achievement goals.
- Demonstrates competence in content knowledge appropriate to the teaching position.
- Demonstrates competence in planning and preparing for instruction.
- Uses strategies to deliver instruction that meets the multiple learning needs of students.
- Uses a variety of methods to monitor student learning.
- Demonstrates competence in classroom management.
- Engages in professional growth.
- Fulfills professional responsibilities established by the school district.

Better Evaluations, Better Feedback, Better Teachers

Iowa teachers are evaluated every year, every 10 years, every 15 years, somewhere in between or not at all. Iowa teachers and administrators alike are frustrated by poor evaluations systems, low quality feedback on performance and the lack of support for struggling teachers. With this legislation newly trained administrators will comprehensively evaluate teachers every five years with the focus on providing teachers valuable feedback and support. This legislation provides \$1.5 million for next school year to begin the research and development of and initiation of evaluator training for administrators and, as space permits, interested teachers. Successful completion of the evaluator training program nets the individual up to \$1,000. The legislation also contemplates annual reviews and peer participation in those annual reviews both by 2004.

Pilot Team-based Variable Pay Project

This legislation provides a two-year trial opportunity for a few Iowa school districts or school buildings to learn about variable pay. The team-based variable pay is above and beyond the base pay each teacher already receives. Student learning goals for the building that are aligned with the district's school improvement plan set the stage for rewarding the combined efforts of stakeholders in a school building. Achievement towards those building level goals drives this unique type of compensation. The legislation provides \$1 million for all participants in this pilot program. The per educator amount depends upon the number of pilot sites with a limit of not more than \$100 allocated per student. Participants in this pilot program will gain the attention of a legislative committee that will meet over the next two years to recommend a statewide variable pay plan.

We Can Make a Difference

The future of Iowa's education system cannot rest solely on our past successes. Real change in the way we support and pay teachers was as imminent as our changing student population. It would not benefit teachers, parents or students to only increase salaries. Strategies for paying teachers, additional support for teachers and better career opportunities for aspiring teachers were necessary. Both the level of funding and certain particulars in this legislation are not exactly as many of us had hoped. Policy leaders need to rally around this legislation as a starting point, understanding that we do not have the total or final picture.

We will all learn together, be patient with each other, and, above all, communicate with each other. There are not many places in this country or in this world like Iowa where the educational values and dedication are strong enough to move forward with this type of change. I am convinced that Iowa can and will pull together to make this a success.

What's Our Next Step?

Implementation begins today. School districts, school boards, administrators and teachers school districts certainly won't have to wait until this fall to learn of the available benefits and options. We will quickly:

- Schedule a series of informational meetings across the state over the ICN for early June. At these meetings we will provide a timeline for implementation and discuss district options for participating next school year.
 - Set up a focus group to advise and participate in implementation.
 - Create a DE Web discussion page for you to post and review frequently asked questions.
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